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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Fifty-sixth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 69th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 28 April 2000, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. SIMKHADA (Nepal)

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GE.00-13686 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.35 p.m.

DRAFT PROVISIONAL AGENDA FOR THE FIFTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION (agenda item 21 (a)) (E/CN.4/2000/L.1)

1. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the draft provisional agenda for the fifty-seventh session of the Commission (E/CN.4/2000/L.1), distributed in an unedited version in English only, containing the list of documents concerning each agenda item. If there was no objection, he would take it that the Commission wished to take note of the document.

2. It was so decided.

REPORT TO THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL ON THE FIFTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION (agenda item 21 (b)) (E/CN.4/2000/L.99, E/CN.4/2000/L.10 and Add.1 to 17 and E/CN.4/2000/L.11 and Add.1 to 8)

Draft decision E/CN.4/2000/L.99 (Report of the Commission to the Economic and Social Council on its fifty-sixth session)

3. Mr. REYES RODRIGUEZ (Cuba), introducing the draft decision, said that up to 1989 a summary of the administrative and programme budget implications of the resolutions and decisions adopted had always been annexed to the report of the Commission. The draft decision was intended to restore that practice so as to facilitate the work of all delegations to the session of the Economic and Social Council, which was required to take a decision on the resolutions and decisions submitted to it by the Commission and contained in the first part of the report. His delegation trusted that, in view of that consideration, the Commission could adopt the draft by consensus.

4. The draft decision E/CN.4/2000/L.99 was adopted without a vote.

5. Ms. GERVAIS-VIDRICAIRE (Canada), Rapporteur of the Commission, introduced the report of the Commission on its fifty-sixth session, which was in two parts. The first part (E/CN.4/2000/L.11 and Add.1 to 8) consisted of a compilation of 87 resolutions and 13 decisions adopted by the Commission. The second part (E/CN.4/2000/L.10 and Add.1 to 17) contained a description of the work of the Commission, principally the general debate and the vote on the resolutions and decisions on the various agenda items. It also contained the four statements made by the Chairman. In order to make the report easier to read, the content of the general debate appeared in the form of a table which would be annex 3 to the report, provisionally distributed with the symbol E/CN.4/2000/Misc.3.

6. The Commission's report dealt with the technical aspects of its work. For all information on the substance of the debate, reference should be made to the summary records of the meetings (E/CN.4/2000/SR.1 to 69). Chapter I, containing the draft resolutions and draft decisions to be submitted for approval to the Economic and Social Council, and Chapter II, containing the resolutions and decisions adopted by the Commission, would be available for consideration at

the Council's next session in July 2000. The draft report was subject to correction; members of the Commission had a week to submit corrections to document E/CN.4/2000/L.10 and its addenda and to draft annex 3 to the report.

7. She thanked the secretariat for its most valuable assistance and mentioned in that regard the important contribution the interns had made. She hoped that the clearer presentation of the report would make it easier to consult.

8. The CHAIRMAN said that, as at previous sessions, the draft report would be adopted ad referendum, on the understanding that the final version would be prepared by the Rapporteur with the assistance of the secretariat. If there was no objection, he would take it that the Commission accepted that procedure.

9. It was so decided.

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10. Ms. ROBINSON (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that the spirit of cooperation and dialogue that had prevailed during the session had enabled the Commission to achieve results for which she wished to express her appreciation.

11. With reference to the issue of equality, the Commission had shown its determination to combat all forms of discrimination, and the importance it attached to the preparations for the World Conference to Combat Racism. The Office of the High Commissioner for its part intended to do its utmost to make the Conference an event of decisive importance and, at the start of a new century, register the message that all human beings were members of one and the same family.

12. She also welcomed the adoption of resolutions emphasizing equal rights for women and condemning, in addition to discrimination against them in many areas, the abhorrent phenomenon of trafficking in women and children. It was important to mobilize consciences against those terrible violations of fundamental rights as preparations were being made to review the Beijing Platform for Action adopted five years earlier.

13. Progress had been made towards the establishment of a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which would ensure a regular exchange of information between Governments, the United Nations and indigenous peoples.

14. The adoption of two protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child sent a strong signal that protection of the rights of every child was a matter of the highest priority on the agenda of the international community.

15. In devoting its special dialogue to poverty and its debilitating consequences for the realization of human rights and in deciding to recommend the appointment of two new special rapporteurs, on the right to food and on the right to housing, the Commission had shown its intention of applying in a practical form the principles of the indivisibility and the interdependence of all human rights.

16. The Commission's decision to recommend the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the protection of human rights defenders had been acclaimed throughout the human rights movement. It would undoubtedly go down as one of the great achievements of the Commission. It was shameful that those who sought to defend human rights, including representatives of non-governmental organizations present at the session, should be the target of attacks in their countries. The international community should make clear its solidarity with human rights defenders, in particular by ensuring that the Special Representative could carry out his mandate without hindrance.

17. The Commission's recognition of the importance of the Office of the High Commissioner's programme of advisory services and technical cooperation and the fact that the Commission had recognized the need for further resources for the Office was a source of satisfaction, as was the interest in seminars and workshops organized with the latter's help.

18. She also noted a growing sense of appreciation in the Commission for the work of its rapporteurs, the sum of whose reports constituted a veritable world report on human rights. In her Annual Appeal for voluntary contributions, she had set out her hopes for the strengthening of special procedures and support for treaty bodies.

19. On the subject of reform, the Commission had again shown in the year 2000 that through dialogue and cooperation constructive reforms could be achieved. The decisions it had taken in that regard were tangible contributions to the process of reform launched by the Secretary-General.

20. At the start of the session, she had urged the Commission to address the crucial question of the prevention of gross human rights violations. It was one of the greatest challenges facing the international community. There was scope for further action in that area and at future sessions the Commission should seek means of elaborating strategies which could have a practical impact. She was prepared to work closely with the Bureau and with members of the Commission to mobilize efforts in that direction.

21. The principle of prevention concerned not only the violation of civil and political rights but also that of economic, social and cultural rights. She had in mind the current situation in the Horn of Africa. It was crucial that the international community should respond to that situation from a human rights point of view. It must act preventively. As the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Ms. Catherine Bertini, who had just conducted a mission to the region, had observed, three consecutive years of drought had deprived some 16 million people of food and water and threatened their existence. The relief assistance currently in the pipeline should suffice for the next two to three months, but the situation could become critical after the month of June if the promised aid did not arrive. She wished to launch a solemn appeal to the international community to prevent a new humanitarian catastrophe. Governments, for their part, should do everything possible to ensure the unhindered passage of relief assistance; that involved efforts to ensure peace and security. The situation in the Horn of Africa provided an opportunity for the practical implementation of the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights and could be considered a test case. It was her intention to keep the Bureau of the Commission on Human Rights informed of developments in the region so that the Commission itself could watch over the protection of the right to life in that situation.

22. The CHAIRMAN said that, as the first session of the Commission in a new century, the fifty-sixth session of the Commission was of historic importance. It could be satisfied with what it had achieved in six weeks although much remained to be done. In particular, in resolution 2000/59 it had adopted the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, concerning the involvement of children in armed conflict and the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The effective implementation of those protocols should contribute to improving the situation of children. The Commission had also decided to approve and implement in their entirety the recommendations on the rationalization of its work contained in the report of the inter-sessional open-ended Working Group on Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights (E/CN.4/2000/112). It had further decided to appoint for a period of three years a special rapporteur whose mandate would focus on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living (resolution 2000/9), a special rapporteur on the right to food (resolution 2000/10) and a special representative who would report on the situation of human rights defenders in all parts of the world and on possible means of enhancing their protection (resolution 2000/61). Lastly, the important discussions arising out of the preparatory process for the World Conference against Racism and the formation of the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee had highlighted the importance of the issue and the Commission's will to make the Preparatory Committee and the World Conference itself a success.

23. He had always been aware of the valuable human rights activity of the NGOs and their important role in the Commission and had tried regularly to meet and have dialogue with their representatives on the implications of some of the new approaches adopted on the basis of the reflections presented by the Chairman and Bureau of the fifty-fifth session on how NGOs could participate in the work of the Commission. The ideas expressed were the result of long consultations with the NGOs and were meant to make their participation more effective and to save some time. Some of the new procedures needed further analysis but positive results had already been seen. It was essential that a constructive dialogue should be initiated with NGOs and civil society for enhancing the partnership among Governments, international organizations and NGOs.

24. The session had also been characterized by other highlights, including, first and foremost, the address by the Secretary-General, who had reiterated that the Commission on Human Rights was among the most important organs of the United Nations system and had made another appeal for the universal ratification and implementation of the two Covenants as well as the principal international human rights instruments. The special dialogue on poverty and the enjoyment of human rights had highlighted the fact that poverty was a serious denial of human dignity and human rights but that the world did have the physical and human resources necessary to end it. That dialogue along with the adoption of the resolution on the right to development reflected the collective determination of the international community to promote social progress and better standards of life in greater freedom and to employ international mechanisms for the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights. The importance attached to the work of the Commission could also be seen in the extremely high number of dignitaries - 64 - who had addressed the Commission during the session.

25. He wished to express his deep appreciation to the members of the Bureau and all the coordinators of regional groups who had helped him greatly in his work. The past six weeks had

also given him an opportunity to observe the dedication with which Ms. Mary Robinson, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, performed her duties and he thanked her for her appeal on behalf of the victims of the drought in the Horn of Africa. He also wished to thank the Deputy High Commissioner, Mr. Ramcharan, the Secretary of the Commission and her Deputy and all the staff of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Conference Services and the press. He had a special tribute to pay to Ms. Wilma Gibson, the Conference Officer, on the occasion of her retirement; she had rendered great services to the Commission for years and her affability, competence and efficiency would be missed by everyone. He expressed his appreciation to the representatives and special rapporteurs and to the independent experts who rendered great service to the international community. Lastly, he sincerely thanked all the delegations, in particular the delegation of Nepal, for their support and cooperation.

26. The international community should continue its action on behalf of human rights, in particular through a practical approach to extreme poverty, making conflict prevention and resolution a priority area in the context of efforts for the promotion and protection of human rights and prevention of their violation. It should also ask itself whether instruments designed primarily to protect citizens from violations of their rights by the State responded to the emerging reality of declining State and growing non-State influence on society and people. The Commission's deliberations could become more meaningful if every State adopted the approach of introspection and self-appraisal rather than that of blaming others. There was a need for the worst forms of human rights violations to be identified and denounced to the Commission - not by one country or countries banding against another, but through a more universally accepted international mechanism.

27. In the same way as the new technologies made it possible to improve communication and understanding between societies and peoples, the Commission could be an international forum for communication, dialogue and cooperation if its decisions, both favourable and critical, were respected. Wherever and whenever there was a serious infringement of the dignity and rights of human beings, the Commission had to take a stand. At its fifty-sixth session it had proved that the human family was moving forward slowly but surely on its way to building a global society in which there would gradually be greater freedom from fear and want for everyone.

28. After an exchange of courtesies and thanks by the regional groups, the CHAIRMAN declared the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on Human Rights closed.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.